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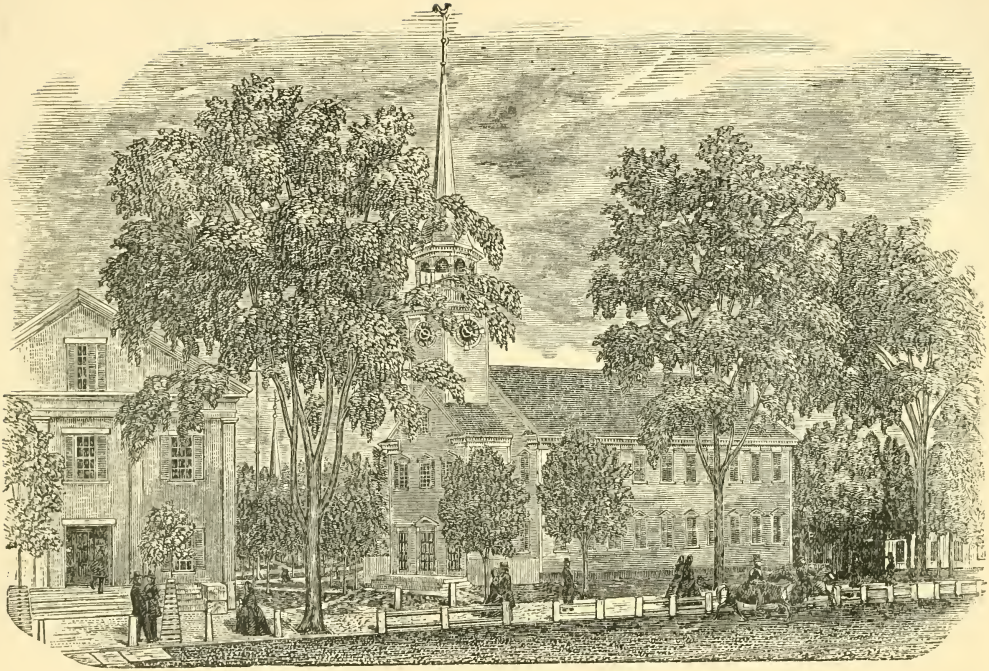

Old South Church and City Hall 1828.

WORCESTER LEGENDS

INCIDENTS, ANECDOTES, REMINISCENCES, ETC.,

CONNECTED WITH THE EARLY HISTORY OF
WORCESTER, MASS., AND VICINITY.

COMPILED BY WILLIAM A. EMERSON, CORRECTED BY FRANKLIN P. RICE
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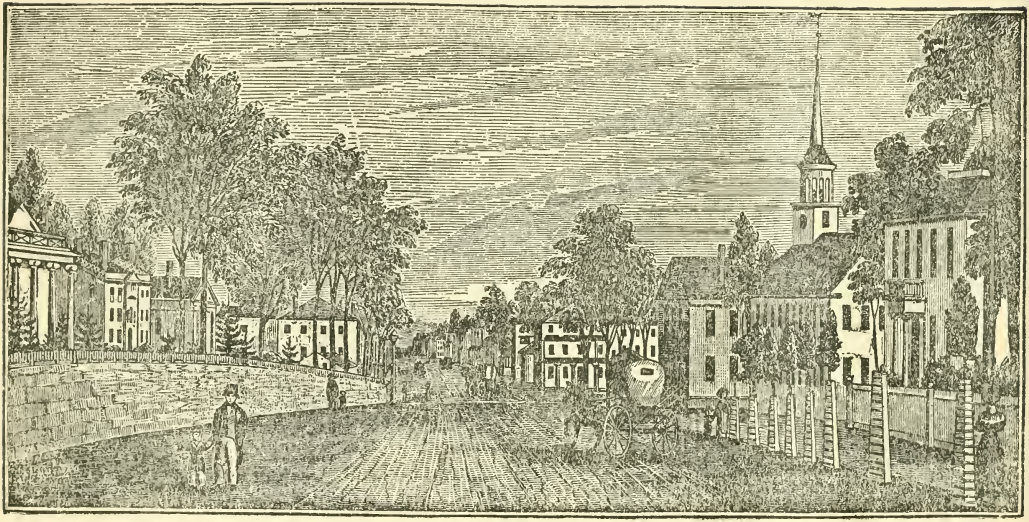


View of Main Street, 1836, showing Old South Church and City Hall on the Right.

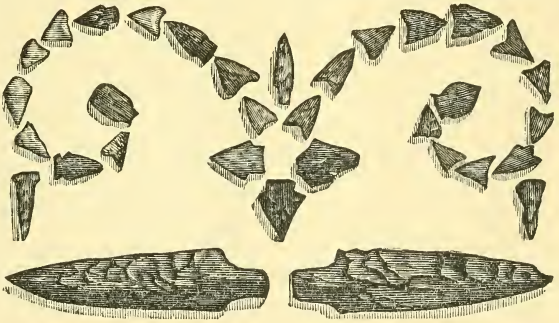
INDIAN REMINISCENCES.

JUST when the first settler located in Worcester is not positively known, but previous to 1674 one person, Ephraim Curtis from Sudbury, settled upon his claim, situated on what is now Lincoln street. Other settlers soon followed, among the more noted of whom were Captain Daniel Gookin of Cambridge, Daniel Henchman of Boston, Thomas Prentice of Woburn, and Lieutenant Richard Beers of Watertown.

Previous to the advent of the whites Pakachoag Hill, near where the College of the Holy Cross now stands, was the seat, or headquarters, of a tribe of about one hundred Nipmuck Indians, under

Sagamore John; another tribe of about the same number occupied Tatnuck Hill, under Sagamore Solomon. Until the breaking out of King Philip's War these sons of the forest seem to have lived on the most pacific terms with the white settlers, and under the influence of that distinguished apostle to the Indians, John Eliot, many of them had made considerable advance in civilization, and some had professed Christianity. Here they pursued their rude arts of husbandry and predatory life combined, evidence of which is conclusively shown in the numerous Indian relics exhumed from time to time. Under these favorable circumstances a permanent settlement was rapidly being made, when, in the summer of 1675, the war instigated by King Philip, in Plymouth Colony, spread to Massachusetts Colony,

carrying destruction and terror in its track. The tribes of Sagamores John and Solomon became the allies of Philip, and the planters of Worcester, remote from friendly aid, upon the destruction of the nearest settlements, Mendon, Brookfield, and Lancaster, were compelled to desert their plantation and disperse among the larger towns. The savages took possession of, and burned the Worcester settlement Dec. 2, 1675.



Among the settlers of Worcester, who took part in the desperate battles with the Indians which followed, were Captain —afterwards

General—Henchman, who was made commander-in-chief of the militia of the settlement; Lieutenant Richard Beers, who was killed in an engagement with the Indians at Northfield, and Lieutenant Phineas Upham, who was mortally wounded in the attack on Narragansett Fort.

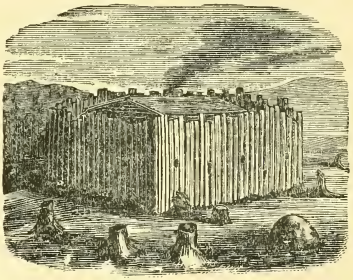
The war was not of long duration, but Philip and his followers, driven from place to place, took

refuge among the Nipmuck villages, where they found a welcome and shelter, and from whence they continued a predatory warfare on the more exposed and isolated dwellings of the settlers. Lincoln, in his admirable History of Worcester, says: "Alarm prevailed throughout New England. None knew when to expect the visitation of the foe, lurking unseen in the solitude of the forest until the blow fell, as sudden as the lightning, and left the effects traced with fire and blood. The husbandman went forth to cultivate the field, armed as if for battle; the musket and sword rested by the pillow, whose slumber was often broken as the war-whoop rose on the watches of the night."

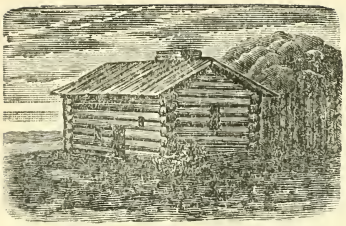
It is said of King Philip that "his enmity was national, not individual. He had staked everything on the struggle and fought to the bitter end according to the established mode of Indian warfare."

He was opposed to the introduction of Christianity among the Indians, and when Mr. Eliot, the missionary, urged the importance of Christianity

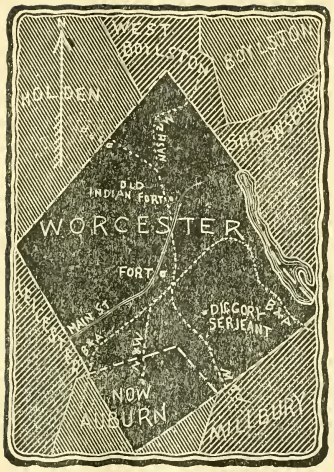
told him he "cared no more for the Gospel than he did for a button upon his coat." The war ended with the death of King Philip, in the summer of 1676, and found Quinsigamond occupied only by Indian women, children, and men too old to bear arms, the warriors having either been slain in battle or fled to Canada. On account of the threatened Indian depredations the settlement remained deserted for several years, but in 1684 a second attempt at settlement was made. The plantation was then named Worcester, signifying war-castle, it having been known previous to that by its Indian name, Quinsigamond.



The first garrison house, the Old Indian Fort, was erected between Grove and Lincoln streets, near the fording place. It was a two-story



structure built of logs, loop-holes for musketry and port-holes for cannon. Near by, on the West side of Mill brook, was built the first saw mill, and a corn mill was afterwards added. These mills were owned by Captain John Wing, who came from Boston. The *first* corn mill, however, was built by Elijah Chase, on the stream near the wire works at Quinsigamond. Captain Daniel Gookin's lots were located on Pakachoag Hill, overlooking what is now Quinsigamond village, and a tract of land called Raccoon Plain between South and New Worcester. General Henchman's location was near Captain Wing's, and included the site of the Worcester and Nashua freight depot and Henchman street. The garrison house of Digory Serjent was located on Sagatabscot Hill, on or near Winthrop street. Beside the garrisons already mentioned there was one

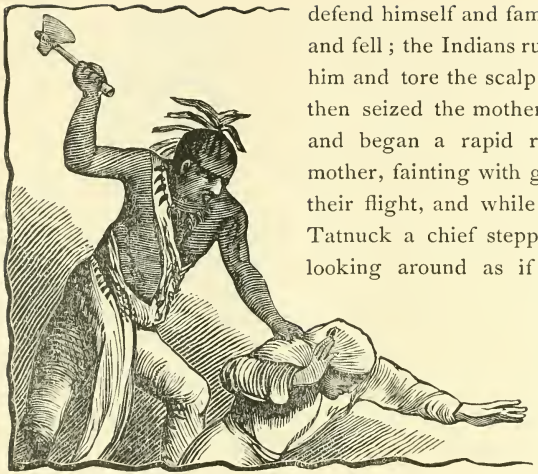


owned by Thomas Brown, north of Adams square; another on the West side of Main street, near Chatham, and another at the junction of Exchange street and Main.

The settlement continued to grow until about the commencement of the eighteenth century, when it was a second time broken up by the Indians, among the victims being the family of Digory Serjent, who was killed while defending his garrison house, and his wife and children were taken prisoners. All the white inhabitants, with the one exception of Serjent and his family, fled from fear of the hostile Indians. He resisted the entreaties of the committee

having the settlement in charge, to seek safety in flight, and remained unmolested through the summer and fall of 1702. Upon the approach of winter an armed force from Marlboro, in pursuit of the Indians who had just committed depredations there, arrived at the house of Serjent and "found the door broken down, the owner stretched in blood on the floor, and the dwelling desolate." The soldiers followed the trail of the Indians for some distance, but so rapid was their retreat they were not overtaken. The pursuing party returned and "buried Serjent at the foot of an oak." The exact location of his grave is not known at this

day. The children of Serjent were taken to Canada. Martha, John and Thomas were afterwards redeemed, Daniel and Mary it is said were held captive and never returned. The eldest, Martha, upon her return married Daniel Shattuck of Marlboro, received her father's estate by will and entered into possession, living for some time in a cabin constructed from the material of the old house, removing afterwards to Marlboro. She was a witness of the death of her father and mother, and gave the following particulars of the awful double tragedy: "When the Indians surrounded her father's house he seized his gun to



defend himself and family; he was fired upon and fell; the Indians rushed in and despatched him and tore the scalp from his head. They then seized the mother and her five children and began a rapid retreat. The wife and mother, fainting with grief and fear, impeded their flight, and while ascending the hills of Tatnuck a chief stepped out of the file and looking around as if for game excited no alarm in the sinking captive. When she had passed by one blow of his tomahawk relieved the savages from the obstruction to their

march." During her seven years' captivity Martha was the unwilling witness of numerous barbarities inflicted by the Indians on their defenseless captives. She saw many prisoners burned at the stake and her own fears were often excited by the fiendish intelligence that soon they should have another dance when she would be the victim. The Sargeants of Worcester county are many of them descendants of Digory Serjent, the name having been changed.

The third and permanent settlement of Worcester was commenced in 1713, the Indians having at that time ceased to haunt the settlement.

A favorite rendezvous of the savages in this vicinity during the early days of the settlements was Wachusett mountain, in the neighboring town of Princeton. Their camping ground was on the northeast side, near the margin of Wachusett lake. Here their council fires were lighted, expeditions planned and treaties made, and here Mrs. Rowlandson remained for some time after her captivity, until she was ransomed. Not only was King Philip with her captors but several of the

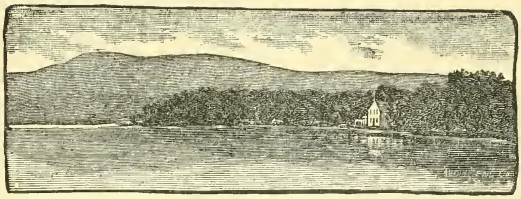
leading chiefs, among them Quinnapin, the master of Mrs. Rowlandson, and his wife, the celebrated "Squaw Sachim" Metamo,

"Queen of Pocasset," next to Philip in influence and cruelty. Mrs. Rowlandson, in her quaint narrative "Twenty Removes," refers to her mistress as "A severe and proud dame, bestowing every day in dressing herself near as much time as any of the Gentry of the Land, powdering her Hair and painting her Face."

Mrs. Rowlandson was here when the Indians returned from Marlboro and was present at the grand pow-wow both before and after the attack on Sudbury. The ransom of Mrs. Rowlandson was secured through the efforts of Mr. John Hoar, who bravely came among the hostile savages

and opened negotiations for her release, which was effected, after a great deal of ceremony and delay, at a place tradition locates in a meadow near a huge bowlder, since known as "Redemption Rock," and near the shores of the pond of the same name. It is said that Philip opposed the release of the captive, and that Mr. Hoar was obliged to conciliate Quinnapin with a pint of rum, upon which he at once got beastly intoxicated. The details of the negotiation are not known, but Mr. Hoar at last succeeded in obtaining the release of Mrs. Rowlandson and her return to Lancaster. In the summer of 1880 Hon. George F. Hoar of Worcester, who is a descendant of John Hoar of Concord, purchased about half an acre of land, in the center of

which "Redemption Rock" is located. The location of this rock is near Everettville, on the west side of the road, only a short distance from the highway. Upon one side, which rises some twelve feet from the ground, is engraved the following inscription: "Upon this rock, May 2, 1676, was made the agreement for the release of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson of Lancaster, between the Indians and John Hoar of Concord. King Philip was with the Indians but refused his consent."

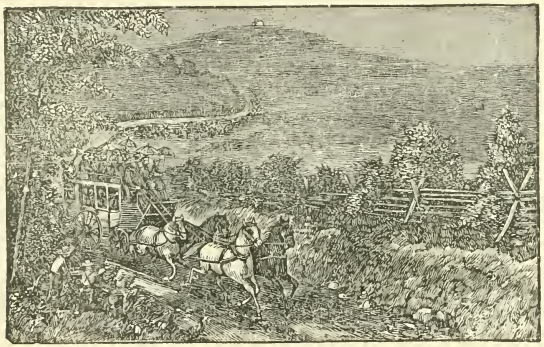


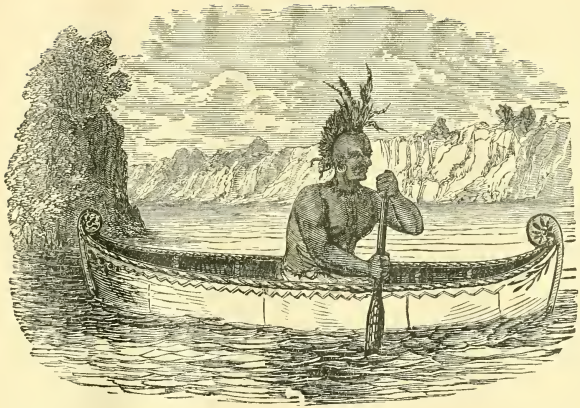
Hanaford, the Historian of Princeton, relates that about the time of the revolution a daughter of a Mr. Keyes, aged four years and eight months, wandered off and became lost in the Wachusett woods. The

people for thirty miles around collected and for weeks searched for her, but without success, nothing of the child was ever discovered, and the parents believed she had been carried off by the Indians. This was made more probable by the story of two men, who, years after, on a trading expedition to Canada related on their return that they found living among the Indians a white woman who knew nothing further of her birth or parentage, than that she once lived near "'Chusett Hill."

The elevation of Mt. Wachusett is 2,480 feet above the sea level, the highest of the range of hills which extend across the state from north to south.

The view from the summit extends over portions of six states, and in a clear day it is said nearly three hundred cities and villages can be distinguished. The great majority of these are in the direction of north-east, east and south-east; the vast panorama extending from the interior to the sea-coast.



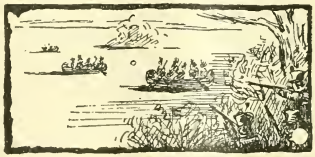


Washacum lakes in Sterling were also the favorite resort of the Indians. Here, just between the two lakes, was the capital of Sholan Sachem of the Nashaways or Nashawogs. It was at his instance that the first English settlement in the limits of the county was made. In the wigwam of Sholan Indian councils were held and the grounds around it were devoted to Indian sports,

games, and "regattas" were held on the waters of the lake. Here was located an Indian church, and by invitation of Sholan, a trader of Watertown built a "trucking house" near by and opened a store.

The old Sagamore and his son dying, the new Sachem, Matthew or Sagamore Sam, a nephew of Sholan and a very different kind of an Indian, became an easy dupe of Philip. In his wigwam between the lakes the plan was laid for the utter destruction of Lancaster.

The first naval battle on the inland waters of Massachusetts was fought at Washacum. In May, 1776, Captain Henchman when marching towards the Connecticut valley was informed that there was a party of hostile Indians at this lake. He turned hither and surprised a party in their canoes taking fish. He led an instant attack upon them, killing seven and taking twenty-nine prisoners.



Apples and Cider.

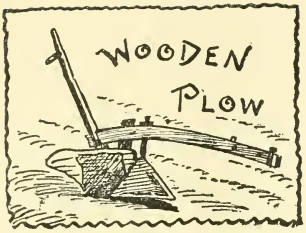
EARLY DAYS IN THE SETTLEMENT.

OR many years after the Indians ceased to trouble the settlement the best energies of the inhabitants were given to the work of subduing the wilderness. The story of these early labors has a peculiar fascination to us, their descendants, although lacking the same interest elicited by the recital of Indian atrocities.

The wilderness lay before them, the lonely and solemn woods used for generations by the Indians as a hunting ground, the stillness at last broken by the ringing tones of the axe and the sound of falling timber, accompanied by the echoes of the voices of the woodmen at their work; then came the time for burning the dry trunks and branches, the planting of barley and corn, the building of

houses and barns, walls, fields, and roads, and in the course of time, when the stumpage had become sufficiently decayed, removing the charred stumps and roots by the use of oxen and heavy chains, then levelling the land, removing the stones, and at last introducing the plough; after this followed the various processes of planting, the setting out of fruit trees and vines, until the wilderness was made to blossom as the rose.

Only those who have lived in frontier towns can appreciate the toil incident to the opening of such a wilderness. One writer of New England history has said: "An immense amount of the most exhausting labor must be expended in the process. The world looks with wonder on the dykes of Holland, the wall of China, the pyramids of Egypt; I do not hesitate



to say that the results produced by the small, scattered population of the American colonies, during the first century, in tearing up the wilderness by the roots, transferring the rocks with which the surface was covered into walls, opening roads, building bridges, and making a rough and broken country, smooth and level, converting a sterile waste into fertile fields, blossoming with verdure and grain and fruitage, is a more wonderful monument of human industry and perseverance than them all. It was the work, not of mere hired laborers, still less of servile minions, but of freemen, owning or winning by their voluntary and cheerful toil the acres on which they labored, and thus entitling themselves to be the sovereigns of the country they were creating."

During the early years of the settlement there were only a sufficient

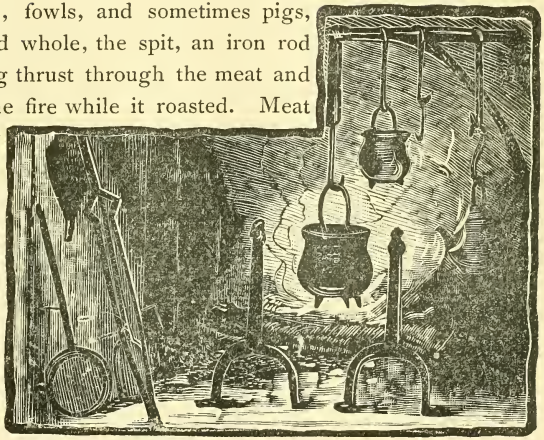
number of mechanics to do the absolutely necessary repairs, to dress the cloth, which was home-spun and made in the family, to do the blacksmithing, make the ploughs and other farming implements, to make and mend the custom shoes, etc. It was a common practice for the shoemaker to pack up his "kit" and go from house to house, making up the shoes for the year.

Nearly every farmer had his field of flax, and some had flax to sell. The wives and daughters

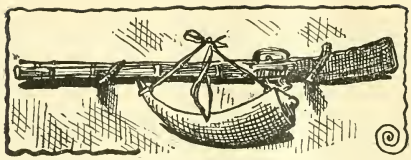
made cloth of it for the family, and the boys at an early age learned to brake and swinge it.

The early houses of the settlement were one-story, with stone chimneys, and built principally of logs, and the windows in many of them were of oiled paper instead of glass. The interiors were unfinished and almost destitute of furnishing, the benches, tables and chairs being home made. The chimneys were large enough in most cases to allow of seats inside the fireplace, where a person sitting in the evening could watch the stars through the top of the chimney. The cooking was done principally in iron pots and kettles, which

hung over the fire on a swinging crane suspended by hooks of different lengths. Wild game, fowls, and sometimes pigs, were roasted or spitted whole, the spit, an iron rod sharp at one end, being thrust through the meat and turned about before the fire while it roasted. Meat was also broiled by contact with the live coals, and corn bread or pancakes were hastily prepared in pans and also baked before the coals. The baking, including the brown bread and beans, was done to a nicety in

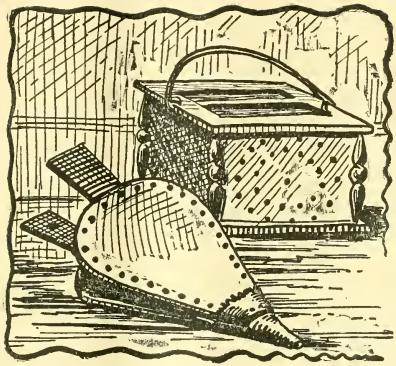


the brick oven adjoining. The tinder-box and flint were used for lighting the fire and the bellows to fan it into a blaze. The ancient iron candle sticks or tallow

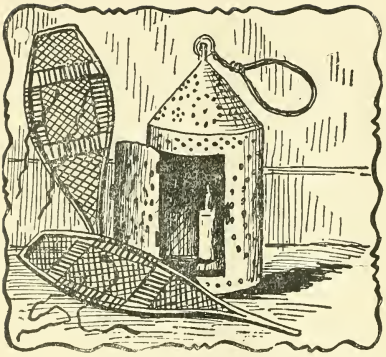


dips stood on the mantle piece, and above on wooden pegs hung the old flint-lock musket and powder horn. The piggin, skillet, and other roughly constructed articles of culinary use; the tin lantern, candle and bullet moulds; mortar and pestle, hour glass, the steelyards, the birch broom, the iron fire shovel and tongs, and other articles of daily use either hung on the walls or stood in their accustomed places. The bare floor and the wooden settle, the dresser with its pewter plates, platters, etc., the reel and quill-wheel, the wooden churn, straight back chairs, the old eight-day clock in the corner, were familiar objects in nearly every New England home.

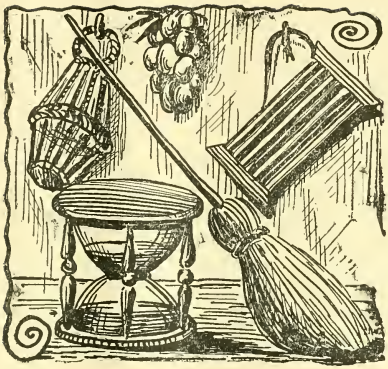
The monotony of life in the settlement was varied by occasional social



gatherings, in which labor and merrymaking went hand in hand. The old fashioned husking and quilting parties were looked forward to and indulged in by all, men, women and children alike entering into the enjoyment of the occasion. After the hay and grain were gathered and the corn and pumpkins were harvested, then came the merry husking party. When the corn had been brought into the corn house or barn and arranged in convenient rows and heaps an evening was appointed for the husking. Towards the close of the appointed day the neighbors, old and young, for miles around began to assemble. They came in wagons



and carts, or on horseback, clad in plain homespun, and at early twilight began their merry labors. The red ear was industriously sought, as it entitled the finder to salute each fair maiden in the room. The ladies of course were allowed the same privilege, but seldom availed themselves of it. Some unfortunate young man, however, after hunting in vain would find his sweetheart equal to the emergency, a red ear would find its way into his hand, and the generous young lady would be repaid by the first kiss. Sometimes there would be a scarcity of red ears, in which case recourse would be had to a choice collection from



the garret which had seen active service in times gone by, and which although showing signs of age were too welcome to excite suspicion or inquiry. The young men found exercise for their gallantry in helping their fair companions to corn from the heap, and in removing the accumulation of husks; then there were songs and stories and gossip; sometimes the whole company were in breathless silence while some old veteran slowly rehearsed a tragic tale of Indian warfare and blood, and then the whole house would resound with loud peals of laughter which followed some comical story or bright flash of wit. Those who

could not rehearse incidents even of doubtful heroism in the army, had their fund of divers anecdotes of struggles with bears, minks, wild-cats, foxes, musquash and coons. After the labors of the evening were finished, the company repaired to the house, where the tables were loaded down with cake and dough-nuts and pies, the pumpkin pies baked in great, deep platters, and the best cheese reserved to be cut on this occasion. After a hearty repast, at which coffee and cider were bountifully supplied, the kitchen was cleared of furniture and the festivities wound up with "blind-man's buff" and other sports, or the old folks were

dismissed and the rest of the time devoted to dancing.

As the long winter evenings drew on social gatherings became more frequent, neighbors would assemble at the house of some one of their number and by their united labor accomplish in a single evening what it would have taken the family months to do. The patchwork quilting would all be done, the corn and nuts all shelled, the young birch stripped down in their strands and birch brooms enough made to last a year in house and barn, and many other useful offices rendered. Outside of these occasions, in which labor and jollity were mingled, the games and amuse-

ments were few and simple. Many of the young men were experts at the games of ball, such as base and foot ball. Shovel-board, domino, backgammon, fox and geese, and checkers were common home amusements. The old fashioned New England winter gave opportunity for sleighing, skating and coasting.

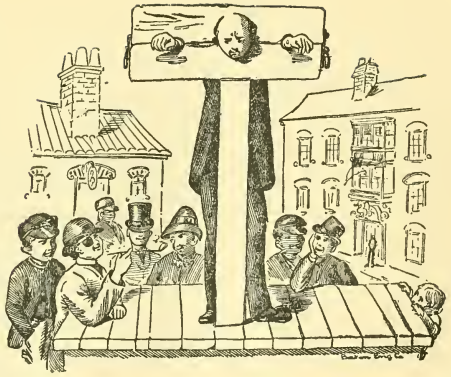
RURAL FIRE DEPARTMENT.

LAWS, CUSTOMS, AND DRESS.

IT would seem that our forefathers were not inclined to place a premium on dishonesty and crime, at all events they provided laws which were exceedingly troublesome to offenders, and rendered the indulgence of profanity, lying, Sabbath breaking, and kindred habits, extremely dangerous. One favorite instrument of punishment, the pillory, consisted of a wooden frame in which the offender's head and hands were made fast; the victim being thus exposed to public ridicule. The ducking-stool was used in some places for the punishment of women who were scolds or slanderers. Blasphemy was sometimes punished by placing the tongue of the swearer in the opening of a split stick.

The stocks were also used to discourage petty offenders, and cages

for the imprisonment of criminals before jails were provided. The time selected for punishment in the pillory, stocks or cage was usually some public holiday or market day, and in the most public place, to make the shame greater.



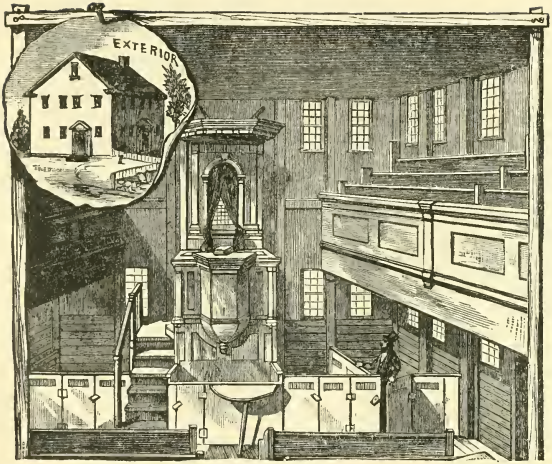
The whipping post was also a familiar object in those days and in the case of more notorious offenders they were given a liberal number of stripes, a turn at the pillory and an hour's sitting on the gallows with the rope around the neck.

The Sunday laws in New England were rigorously enforced. Tything-

Boston Eng. Co.

men with a staff or rod in their hands kept order during the long services. These rods sometimes had a ball on one end and a fox tail on the other. The men of the congregation were kept awake by a tap from the heavy end, and if a woman was caught napping she was awakened by the fox tail brushing against her face.

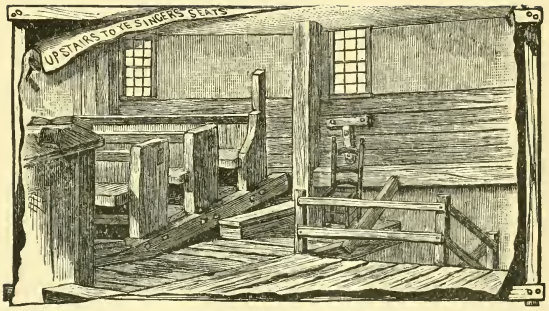
The town constituted the parish in those early days, and every one was expected to attend church regularly and constantly, and it was a part of the duty of the tything-man to look up absentees and bring them



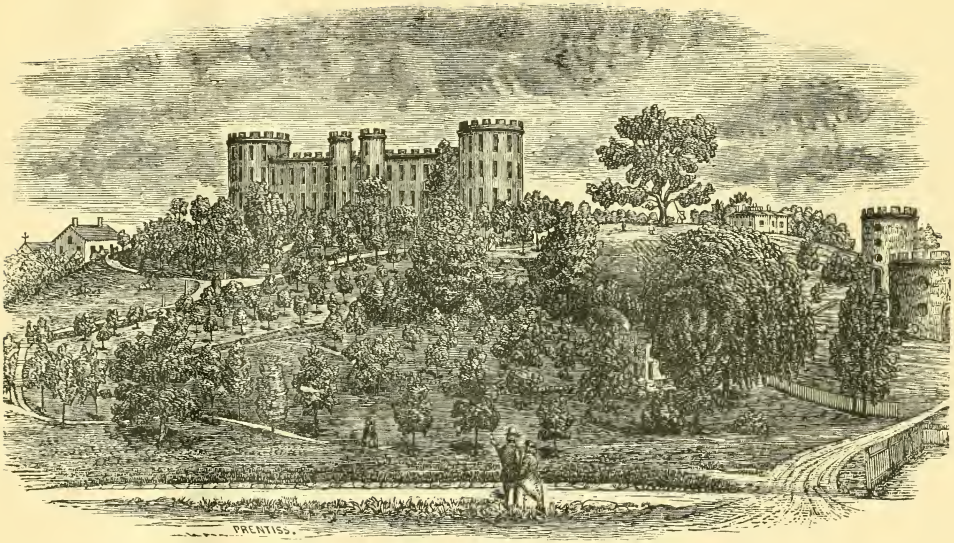
before a legal tribunal if necessary to secure their attendance.

The seating of the meeting-house, and allotting of pews according to the dignity and wealth of the individual, often created dissatisfaction among the inhabitants and sometimes their grievances were the subject of discus-

sion at town meeting. In the earliest meeting-houses the men and women usually sat apart. The galleries were usually free, the men and boys on one side and the women and girls on the other, with the singers' seats opposite the pulpit. In the coldest weather there were no fires for heating the church, but many of the people brought small tin foot stoves in which coals were placed, and it was customary to replenish them with fresh coals at the neighboring houses as occasion required.



Ye Old Fyne Country Chore

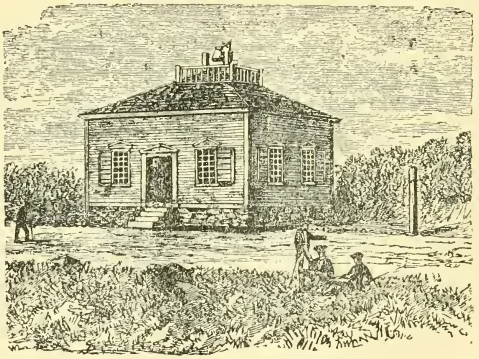


The Oread Institute originated by the Hon. Eli Thayer in 1848.

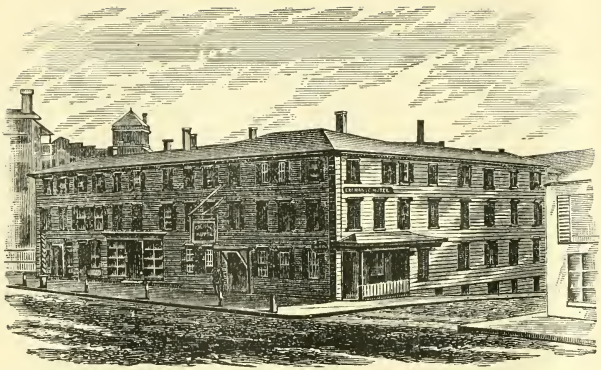
MISCELLANEOUS.

ANY of the old buildings of historic interest have been removed within the last quarter of a century so that little now remains of the Worcester of the past. One after another have "succumbed to the inevitable," and at last the most familiar and cherished landmark, the Old South Church, standing in the way of improvement, has passed from sight. This church edifice was erected in 1763; it was seventy feet long and fifty wide, with a tower on the north end, surmounted by a steeple one hundred and thirty feet high. The principal entrance was on Main street, through a porch, but in 1827 this entrance was closed, the porch removed, and an entrance made through the tower and the

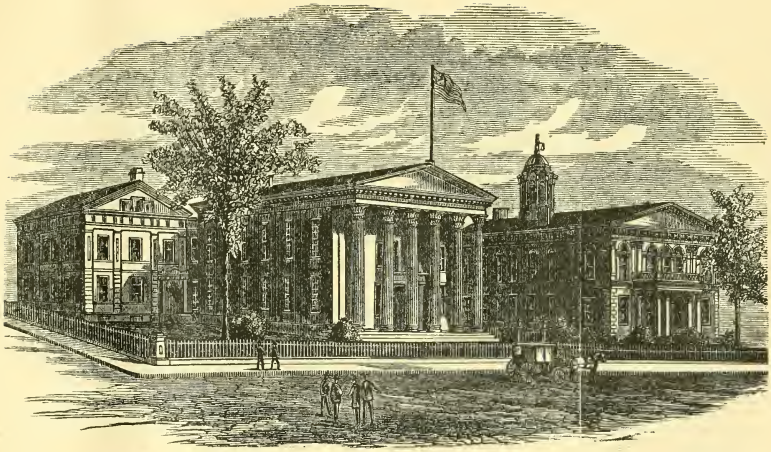
square pews and ancient pulpit were removed. In 1886 the rights of the First Parish in the common were transferred to the city, subject to award of damages by legal authority, and the meeting-house was sold at auction for $320 and torn down, the parish receiving an award of $148,400 damages.



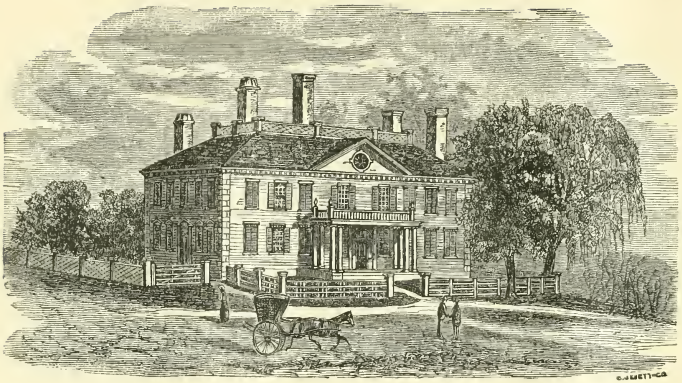
The first county court house was built in 1732–3 on the site where the present court house now stands. The location has always been styled "Court Hill." Judge Jennison gave the land, and the building was put up in 1733.



The exchange Hotel was first known as the "United States Arms," afterwards as "Sikes' Coffee House." General Washington breakfasted here in 1789 and General Lafayette in 1825.

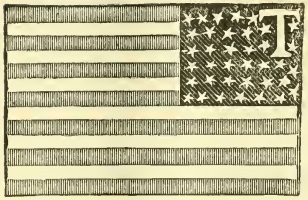


Court Hill. North or Brick Court House completed in 1803. Granite Court House in 1845.



The ancient Salisbury mansion at Lincoln square was erected by the elder Stephen Salisbury in 1770. It presents almost the same general appearance it did when first built.

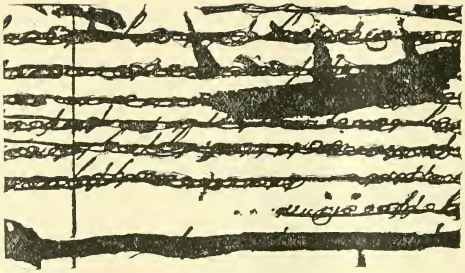
REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD.



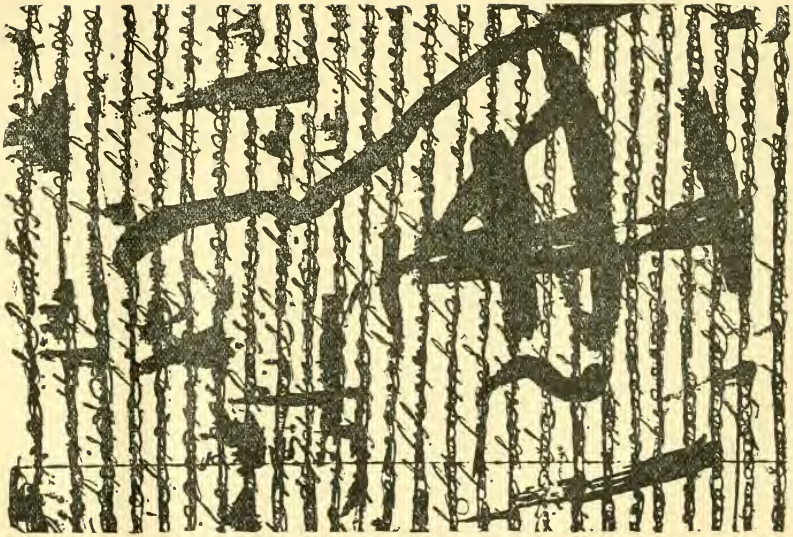
THE present city of Worcester, with its one hundred and thirty thousand inhabitants, was at the time of the Revolution a village of less than two thousand and with a voting population of less than three hundred.

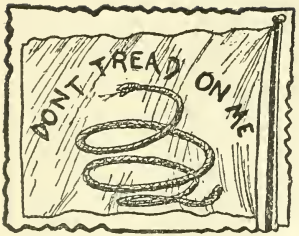
There were at this time throughout the Colonies two opposing political parties, the Tories and the Whigs. The Tories or "loyalists," comprised some of the most respected citizens, who were wealthy and influential in town affairs; the majority, however, were Whigs. The leading members of the latter party just previous to the Revolution favored what was called the "American Political Society," which at that critical period had a marked influence over town affairs,

and controlled to a certain extent the actions of the loyalist party. The members agreed not to buy or use any English goods, particularly tea, until the odious stamp act was repealed. Long and excited discussions were held in town meetings over resolutions to



oppose all enroachments on American liberties. The Tories entered a protest against these resolutions. This protest was rejected, but the town clerk, Clark Chandler, himself a persistent Loyalist, and one of the signers, entered the protest upon the Records. When the fact of its entry was discovered the patriots were indignant with the town clerk for insulting the town by his unwarranted procedure. A petition was at once presented to





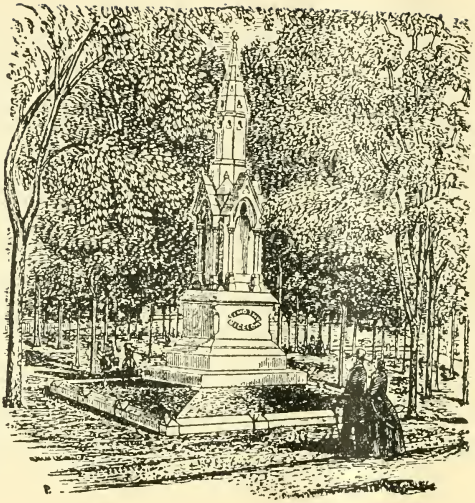
the selectmen asking for a special meeting, which was held Aug. 24th, 1774.

The town "voted, that the town clerk do in the presence of the town obliterate, erase, or otherwise deface the said recorded protest, and the names thereto subscribed, so that it may become utterly illegible and unintelligible." The clerk then with pen and ink defaced line by line the pages on which the obnoxious record was made, but this not satisfying the patriotic indignation of the voters there assembled he dipped his fingers in the ink and drawing them across the records completed the work of making them illegible. A vote was then passed admonishing him to be more circumspect in the execution of the duties of his office, and that he never give the town the like trouble of calling a town meeting again on such an occasion.

When the time came for action the patriotic citizens of Worcester were ready to respond. Upon receiving news from Lexington and Concord the bells were rung and cannon fired, and a company under Captain Timothy Bigelow gathered on the common and after a prayer by Rev. Thaddeus Maccarty proceeded at once to the scene of conflict.

On the 19th of April, 1861, the anniversary of the departure of the minute men in 1775 for the seat of war near Boston, the beautiful monument erected on the common to the memory of Colonel Bigelow was dedicated. It is an interesting fact

that only two days before, the Worcester Light Infantry, who were to have taken part in the exercises, had started with the Massachusetts Sixth for the defence of Washington, and at the very time the dedication ceremonies were going on at Worcester were bravely fighting their way through Baltimore.

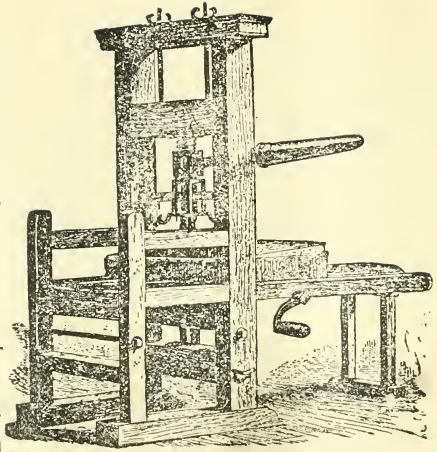


Another important event of the revolutionary period took place on Saturday,

July 13th, 1776, when the messenger bearing the Declaration of Independence stopped on his way from Philadelphia to Boston to bait his horse, and the famous document was read to a hastily assembled crowd from the west porch of the Old South meeting house. It was also read in church the next day by the pastor, Rev. Thaddeus MacCarty, and printed for the first time in New England in the "Massachusetts Spy" of July 17th. After the reading of the Declaration of Independence the assembly proceeded to the Court house, from which they removed the coat-of-arms of Great Britain and consigned it to the flames.

A select company of the sons of freedom then proceeded to the King's Arms tavern, (where the Lincoln House now stands.) The innkeeper cheerfully complied with their request to take down the sign bearing the king's arms, and it was burned in the street. The evening was spent in a general jubilee over the commencement of the new era.

The following are some of toasts drank on that occasion: "George rejected and liberty protected," sore eyes to all



Tories, and a chestnut burr for an eye-stone;" "Perpetual itching without the benefit of scratching, to the enemies of America;" "May the enemies of America be laid at her feet;" "May the freedom and independency of America endure, till the sun grows dim with age and this earth returns to chaos."

It is recorded that notwithstanding the excitement of the day, with its accompaniment of the ringing of bells, firing of cannon, and other demonstrations of joy, the greatest decency and good order was observed, and at a suitable time each man returned to his respective home.

Among the relics of the Isaiah Thomas printing office, now in the possession of the American Antiquarian Society, are the old ramage press upon which the Spy of July 17, 1776, was printed, the imposing stone upon which the forms of the Spy were made up, as well as the type stand, cases, chase, and two composing sticks used at this time.

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